

**APRIL 1 /2, 2017**

**Fifth Sunday of Lent**

1. When Jesus heard about the illness of his friend, Lazarus, He responded, “This illness is not to end in death; rather it is for God’s glory, that through it the Son of God may be glorified.” Every aspect of our lives - our gifts as well as our sufferings – can, if surrendered to Christ, lead to blessings for others and ourselves.
2. Jesus called to his friend from the dead, “Lazarus, come out!” It is the same call that our Lord makes to us unceasingly: Come out!” Jesus calls us from our tomb of doubt and unbelief, from the darkness of our fear and anxieties; from the depths of our weaknesses and lack of hope. Christian stewards pray for an open heart, so that they may hear the voice of the Lord, heed the continuous call to come away from their former way of living, and reprioritize their lives in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**OR** In today’s reading, Martha, a close friend of Jesus, professes her faith in him even in her grief: “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” Good stewards are friends of Jesus and profess their belief in him regularly, even when they are on the very brink of their faith. They know that death is not the last word; that Jesus is an agent of change; that faithful stewards never die. Are we friends of Jesus? Do we actually believe the Creed we profess? Do we believe Christ has the power to transform our lives? To give us eternal life?

3. **“Lord, if you were here, my brother would not have died.”** Such was Martha’s greeting to Jesus when he arrived in Bethany, a small village approximately four miles southeast of Jerusalem. He receives the same greeting from Mary. Their greetings reveal both faith and doubt, faith that Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus and doubt that he could not do anything about it. Jesus understood their doubts. If we do not occasionally doubt our faith, we may not have a faith to doubt. Jesus was teaching Martha and Mary what he would later teach Thomas, “Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe.” Jesus uses this whole episode to teach all of us that we must be good stewards of our faith. When we have doubts, do we let them linger and fester; or do we try to resolve them by seeking the counsel of our clergy, studying the teachings of the Church, or discuss them with a spiritual director or someone we can trust? If not, we may sink deeper into our doubt and lose our grip on our faith.

**APRIL 8/9, 2017**

**Palm Sunday**

1. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" shout the crowds in today's Gospel. May we be always ready to share our blessings when we are sent in His name!

**OR:** "The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I may know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them," says Isaiah in today's first reading. The gifts God has given us are likewise given for the good of others. How am I using my gifts?

2. We are at the doorsteps of Holy Week where we remember Christ's passion. Jesus humbled Himself and let go of everything, emptying Himself for us. During this time of Lent, how have we joined the Lord? Has our prayer, penitential practices and almsgiving moved us to humble ourselves before the Lord? Have we let go of things that keep us from being authentic stewards of Christ Jesus? Have we "emptied" ourselves so that when we approach the table of the Lord, we can be nourished by His body and blood? As disciples of Christ and stewards of his gift of faith, it is time to evaluate our lives under the cross.

**OR:** In Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians he makes clear that Christ "emptied Himself." He was not "full of Himself." Jesus embraced the characteristics of humility, service, and obedience to carry out the will of the Father. Christian stewards know that there is no room for the Lord in a life that is full of oneself. Christian stewards follow Christ's example by taking on the characteristics of humility, servanthood, and obedience. Our culture does not reward this attitude. But God exalts those stewards who for His sake, empty themselves. It is only when we empty ourselves that there is room for God to work within us.

3. ***"Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will."*** Prayer is not so much about what we say to God but about what we are willing to **hear from** God. When we are in true communion with God to discern his will for us, he may ask us to do something difficult or unpleasant, something we have not done before, something that may antagonize our family and friends, or something involving financial or physical risk. And it is okay if our answer of "No!" But if we are good stewards of our prayer life, growing constantly in communion with God to discern his will, we will ultimately say "Yes!" to God. Only a fool would want to accept the cup that Jesus knew was in front of him. Jesus was no fool. But Jesus was not willing to destroy the communion he had with the Father, so he was willing to accept he cup. What are we willing to hear from God? When God places a cup in front of us that we would rather not accept, how will we respond?

**APRIL 15/16, 2017**

**Easter Sunday**

1. Very early in the morning after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with precious oils. The reward of this good and conscientious steward was to be among the first to know that Jesus has been raised from the dead! Alleluia!
2. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles reminds us that we, too, bear witness to the risen Lord. The presence of Christ is within us, making us new, transforming us, turning us into stewards of the Good News. There is no more time for holding grudges, disliking others, seeking vengeance, maintaining old prejudices, tolerating bias. We are Christ's joy and instruments of his peace. Our world is reordered. Reflect on now we are called to let Christ's forgiveness, reconciliation and love permeate our lives. We are Easter people. Rejoice! He is Risen! Alleluia!

**OR** The reading from the Acts of the Apostles reminds us that we, too, bear witness to the Risen Lord. The presence of Christ is within us, making us new, transforming us, turning us into stewards of the Good News. There is no more time for holding grudges, disliking others, seeking vengeance, maintaining old prejudices, tolerating bias. We are Christ's joy and instruments of his peace. Our world is reordered. Reflect on how we are called to let Christ's forgiveness, reconciliation, and love permeate our lives. We are Easter people. Rejoice! He is Risen! Alleluia!

3. ***"For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead."*** Simon Peter and John rushed to the tomb after Mary Magdalene told them it was empty. They had spent the past three days with Jesus watching as he healed the sick, drove out demons, raised people from the dead, and was transfigured in the presence of Moses and Elijah. They knew Jesus on a first name basis. Now they are comforted with the most important and revealing event in the history of the salvation of mankind – the Resurrection. It would take two visits by Jesus to the apostles locked in an upper room and a meal he served on the shores of the Sea of Galilee for them to begin to believe Jesus was truly risen. Our own faith in the Risen Jesus is constantly tested. As good stewards of that faith we must continue to grow in our awareness and appreciation of all that our Triune God has done for us. We must learn and love Scripture and tradition. Our desire should be to get to know Jesus, Our Risen Lord on a first name basis.

**April 22/23, 2017**

**Second Sunday of Easter**

1. Jesus meets the need of each disciple. To the fearful in the upper room, He speaks words of peace. To doubting Thomas, He provides the tangible proof of His resurrection. What do I need to become His disciple? What do I have to share that might meet someone else's needs?
2. In today's first reading, the four activities of the earliest church are introduced to us as priorities of the church: devotions to the teachings of the apostles, communal fellowship, the Eucharist, and prayer. The early members of the church saw themselves as devoted stewards of these activities. These are not options. They are the fruits of a genuine conversion to a life in Christ. Sharing in the Eucharist was the most intimate expression of fellowship while the most common expression of fellowship in the New Testament was that of sharing financial resources – giving. It was not a perfect community, but one that gave evidence of God's active presence in its midst. The early community offers us an excellent example of how to better exercise stewardship in our own parish families.

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3. ***"Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."*** (John 20:19-31) "On the evening of the first day of the week," Jesus appeared to his disciples who were in a room *behind locked doors*. He said, "Peace be with you" and breathed on them and gave them the power to forgive sins. He passed on to them the responsibility for his mission and his message. Thomas was not with them and had some doubts. A week later they were still hiding *behind locked doors*, but now Thomas was with them. He saw Jesus and proclaimed, "My Lord and my God." Jesus knew that Thomas and the others believed because they had seen. He also knew others who had not seen him would come to believe. That is us. Fortunately, we have the faith of Thomas, the other disciples, and billions who have believed in Jesus for over 2000+ years to support our faith in Jesus as our Risen Lord. What are we doing to deserve that faith? What are we doing to nurture our faith? What are we doing that will lead others to believe in Jesus because of our faith? What are we doing to carry on the mission and spread the Gospel of Jesus?

**April 29/30, 2017**

**Third Sunday of Easter**

1. The disciples on the road to Emmaus walked and talked with Jesus all day long, but it was not until they offered Him hospitality and He blessed and broke the bread that they recognized Him. Simple acts of kindness *still* reveal the presence of God in our midst.
2. As today's gospel reveals, the first meal shared with the risen Lord happened in a place called Emmaus. Perhaps there is no better time to reflect on this story than in those prayerful moments at mass when we return to our place after receiving Holy Communion. Those few moments give us an opportunity to reflect on our stewardship of Christ's presence within us. We have a chance to practice hospitality by inviting Jesus into our hearts to walk and talk with us about our own Emmaus journey. We can relive once again the time when he broke bread for the disciples. And just as they did, we too can recognize Christ in this meal we have just shared with others.
3. ***"Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures for us?" (Luke 24:13-35)*** Despite a flurry of archeological activity in the Holy Land, especially around Jerusalem, archeologists have not definitively located Emmaus. St. Luke said it was seven miles from Jerusalem. Nine sites northwest of Jerusalem compete to be the "village of Emmaus." Yet, it is not the location that makes Emmaus significant; it is the event – the Risen Jesus teaching two of his disciples all of the passages in the Old Testament that referred to him. What a wonderful experience, especially when they recognized him after "He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them." We have the New Testament and Tradition, the completion of God's Revelation of Himself to us. Every time we participate in the Eucharist, Jesus in the person of our priest, takes bread, says a blessing, breaks it, and gives it to us. Oh, how our hearts should be burning within us, no matter where we are. If not, we may need to spend more time walking with Jesus by reading Scripture, wherever we are.